

SEP 23 1999

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3442 Divisadero Street
San Francisco, CA 94123

September 22, 1999

Lester Snow
Executive Director
CalFed Bay/Delta Program
1416 Ninth Street
Suite 1155
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Mr. Snow:

I am writing to voice my opinions on the CalFed process. I have attended the Oakland meeting and watched as agricultural interests brought in busloads of people to spew uninformed rhetoric about how more water is needed to ensure their success. Accounts I have read further my conviction that agricultural interests have attempted to hijack these meetings to their own profit. I am writing to implore you to concentrate on the mission of CalFed: to improve water quality and the San Francisco Bay Delta. This, of course, cannot be achieved through added dams or water diversions but only through increasing free flow in rivers.

As Albert Einstein once said: a problem cannot be solved through the same methodology by which it was created. Our water problems in California, including poor water quality, degraded ecosystems, and reduced fisheries, were created by our urge to dam our rivers and by the fact that there are already over 1,400 major dams in California. Any further diversions and added or raised dams will only exacerbate this problem. What we need to do is to decrease diversions and to take down low-value dams. To fulfill its mission of aquifer improvement, CalFed must guarantee flows to rivers and maintain adjacent land.

CalFed has a historic opportunity to improve our aquifers. To this end, CalFed should invest in groundwater management, pollution prevention, and water conservation. Though agricultural lobbyists will deny this fact, over 80% of California's water is used by agriculture. Studies have shown that, through conservation, significant amounts of water can be saved while at the same time crop output has increased. Significant funds should be devoted to conservation programs and to developing new methods of conservation. We cannot afford to continue to waste water.

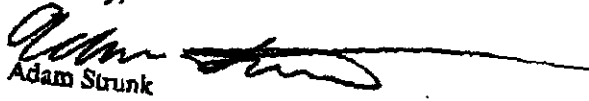
As an economist, I am appalled by the pricing structures of agricultural water. Agriculture currently pays ten percent of the cost of the water they consume, sometimes less. As any economist can attest, subsidized commodities will be used in amounts above optimal levels. The reason farmers claim they need more water is that they pay so little for the water they do use. If required to pay the market cost of water used, farmers would reduce water consumption drastically due to market forces. Claims that more water is needed would vanish and taxpayers would save significant amounts of money.

Similarly, all residential and business water users must be required to pay for the volume of water they use. Many Central Valley communities currently charge only for water access, with water itself being free. Just as farmers use excessive amounts of water due to it being cheap, urban users use excessive amounts due to it being free. By charging market prices for water to urban users, these users will yield to market pressures and reduce water use through lower flow showers and toilets and through efficient use of irrigation water.

The twenty-first century is upon us, and with it increased taxpayer awareness of how our money is spent. The days of pork-barrel politics are over. The tax paying public will no longer tolerate subsidizing expensive water projects to enrich special interests such as agriculture and development. The public has made its opinions clear: we want a sound environment. CalFed has been given its charge. It is up to you to see that it is fulfilled.

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Sincerely,


Adam Strunk